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THE SEPULCHRE OF CHRIST IN ART AND LITURGY,
by Neil C. Brooks, University of Illinois Studies in Language
and Literature, Volume VII, Number 2, Urbana, 1921.

The basis for this admirable monograph is the familiar fact that during a long period an important center of dramatic activity in the mediaeval church was the structure, or *locus*, known as the Easter *sepulchrum*. At this Easter sepulchre were performed three liturgico-dramatic offices: "the *Depositio* (*Crucis*, or *Hostiae*, or *Crucis et Hostiae*) of Good Friday, symbolizing and commemorating the Entombment, the *Elevatio*, in which the buried symbol or symbols were raised early on Easter morning in commemoration of the Resurrection, and the *Visitatio Sepulchri*, later on Easter morning, representing the visit of the Maries to the tomb after the Resurrection."¹ The precise aim of the author may be clearly known from his own words at the outset:²

The purpose of this study is to bring together and interpret, as far as possible, the essential facts about the sepulchre as known from art, architecture, and archives, and from liturgical rubrics. The study is an outgrowth of interest in the liturgic drama and is to be viewed primarily as an attempt to enlarge our knowledge of the *mise en scène* of the liturgical Easter plays, i.e., the dramatico-liturgical versions of the *Visitatio* and *Elevatio*.

For explaining the nature of the Easter sepulchre as *mise en scène* for the dramatic offices there are, then, four principal kinds of evidence: representations in art, archaeological remains, archival records, and the rubrics of the dramatic pieces themselves. Of these several sources of information a certain number of previous writers have fairly mastered, let us say, one or two; and a few writers have shown some general acquaintance with all four. Professor Brooks, however, is the first scholar known to me who has effectually grasped all four sorts of evidence, with the result of producing a treatise which was greatly needed, and which almost no one else could have accomplished. It was to be expected that preceding archaeologists and historians of art should expound the *sepulchrum* in its structure and appearance; and this task one scholar or another has performed for certain periods and localities. But a survey of this matter for both East and West, covering the whole period from the first century to the sixteenth, is provided for the first time in the work before us. On the other hand, whereas one could not expect archaeologists and historians of art to possess the minute literary and liturgical information necessary for interpreting the dramatic offices performed at the *sepulchrum*, Professor Brooks fully possesses just this information, gained through some two decades of notable success in editing and explaining unpublished texts of the liturgico-dramatic offices of Easter.

¹ Brooks, p. 30.

² Brooks, p. 8.

For the precise task under consideration, then, Professor Brooks is most happily competent.³

From this competence derives, naturally enough, the lucidity of the treatise in its several parts, and that organization of the whole which allows a reviewer to comment upon the chapters in the simple order of the text.

After a brief introductory statement in Chapter One, the exposition proper begins in Chapter Two ("The Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem"). In this section, using the ample evidences of Heisenberg and others, Professor Brooks concisely reviews the architectural arrangements of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem, and traces the vicissitudes of these structures from the period when Constantine (probably) erected the circular *Anastasis* over the Sepulchre, down through the period of the Crusaders, when the buildings took substantially their present complex form. The subject of this short chapter is presented with a clarity that is fortunate in view of the inevitable references to it in later parts of the treatise. Particularly clear to the reader are the disposition of the tomb itself, and the persistence of the rotunda (Anastasis) over it. One is mildly surprised, perhaps, at the author's somewhat casual tone in referring to the *Peregrinatio Etheriae*,⁴ which must always rank among the most authoritative and illuminating expositions of ecclesiological and liturgical matters in Jerusalem in the fourth century and thereabouts. Possibly appropriate quotations from this document might have enriched the exposition.

In Chapter Three ("The Sepulchre of Christ in Art") Professor Brooks surveys the representations of the Sepulchre in art throughout the mediaeval period. The earliest examples are of the fourth and fifth centuries. From this period until the twelfth century the scene in which the Sepulchre appears is that of the Maries encountering the angel at the empty tomb. After the twelfth century the Maries give way before a representation of the Resurrection itself. The present chapter, then, treats especially the representations of the Holy Women at the tomb. Of these representations there are two broad classes: the Eastern and the Western. The eastern examples may be divided into the Syro-Palestinian type and the Byzantine. The Syro-Palestinian type seems to have arisen in the sixth century, in close association with the cult of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem. The scene centers in the tomb itself, which represents, more or less faithfully, the actual Holy Sepulchre of the period of Constantine. The Byzantine type shows the angel as the center of the composition, with a subordinated

³ See, for example, *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum*, Vol. L (1908), pp. 297-312; *id.*, Vol. LV (1914), pp. 52-61; *Journal of English and German Philology*, Vol. VIII (1909), pp. 464-488; *id.*, Vol. X (1911), pp. 191-196.

⁴ See Brooks, p. 11, note 7.

sepulchre in the form of a rock-hewn tomb, of a sarcophagus before an opening into the rock, or of a simple sarcophagus surmounted by a ciborium, or canopy. In the Western representations the sepulchre takes the form of a cylindrical tower, or of a tower-temple in two or more stories, or of a coffer-tomb. The tower-like forms,—notably dissimilar both to the rock tomb of the Gospels and to the actual Sepulchre at Jerusalem,—show a possible influence from the circular Anastasis over the Holy Sepulchre itself, and a more probable influence from the tower-like tombs used generally in antiquity and in early Christian times.

Although I cannot speak as an expert in iconography, I venture to commend unreservedly the comprehensive scope of this chapter, the lucidity of the exposition, and the generous illustration of the text through photographic plates.

Chapter Four ("The Relation of the Sepulchre in Art to the Architecture of the Altar") "is in the nature of an excursus to consider a theory advanced by Dr. J. K. Bonnell."⁵ Dr. Bonnell contended that the Christian altar had a potent influence upon the form of the Sepulchre of Christ as it appears both in art and in the *mise en scène* of the dramatic offices, *Depositio*, *Elevatio*, and *Visitatio*. In the present chapter Professor Brooks addresses himself to the alleged relations of the altar and the representation of the sepulchre in art.

Professor Bonnell emphasizes his observation that, among the representations of the sepulchre, those that show a marked resemblance to the altar surmounted by a ciborium, or canopy, outnumber those in the other groups of his classification.⁶ This observation Professor Brooks combats by showing, for example, that of a hundred or more accessible pictures of all types of sepulchre, Professor Bonnell used only some sixteen, and, further, that of the ten representations that seem to Professor Bonnell to show a resemblance between altar and sepulchre, at least one-half are interpreted erroneously.⁷ In these particular contentions Professor Brooks easily wins one's assent. The incompleteness of Professor Bonnell's evidence is now obvious; and his interpretation of the painting in Hartker's *Liber Responsalis* as a direct imitation of the altar,⁸ for example, is scarcely admissible after one has compared it with the representations of temple-sepulchres (particularly that shown in Figure 14),⁹ the history of which Professor Brooks has amply outlined.

⁵ The study of the late Professor Bonnell referred to is entitled *The Easter Sepulchrum in its Relation to the Architecture of the High Altar*, and it is found in *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, Vol. XXXI, pp. 664-712.

⁶ See Bonnell, pp. 700-712.

⁷ See Brooks, pp. 27-29.

⁸ See Bonnell, pp. 704-706.

⁹ This ivory in the South Kensington Museum was not used by Professor Bonnell.

But although Professor Bonnell's demonstration cannot stand upon the evidence that he himself adduces, my impression is that the possibility of influence from the altar upon the sepulchre in art has not been definitively removed,—an impression that receives some support from the generous materials provided by Professor Brooks himself. I cannot argue the matter in detail here, and I am far from pretending to proficiency in this branch of the general subject; but I venture to mention a few relevant facts and to utter one or two queries. Professor Brooks candidly refers to a certain number of representations of the sepulchre with ciboria over them; but since these examples are almost all Eastern, he assigns them to the Syro-Palestinian type, which "is doubtless in imitation of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, and hence is not reminiscent, or in imitation of the altar ciborium."¹⁰ Has any one yet proved, however, that the form of the Holy Sepulchre itself was not influenced by the forms of early Christian altars? And is it finally certain that the Syro-Palestinian type was free from the influence of the altar, either through the Holy Sepulchre or independently of it? Professor Brooks observes also that a ciborium such as that seen in the mural paintings of S. Angelo in Formis (Fig. 6) "may possibly stand in close relation to Eastern altar ciboria."¹¹ But since ciboria of this particular type seem not to have occurred in the church architecture of the West, Professor Brooks implies that Western representations of the sepulchre with canopy could scarcely show the influence of an altar canopy.¹² Is it certain, however, that Eastern altar canopies could not have influenced the form of Western sepulchre canopies? If such questions are not captious, they may serve as an indication that the possible relations of sepulchre in art and the Christian altar have not yet been definitively expounded. Controversy aside, I myself frankly desire more information concerning early Christian altars in relation to the sepulchre in art and to the Easter sepulchre as a structure, and I surmise that in such works as Rohault de Fleury's *La Messe*¹³ can be found useful *data* not brought forward by Professor Brooks or Professor Bonnell. Professor Brooks would greatly please us all if he would apply his remarkable special learning to an article on this particular subject.

The interest of students of literature will center inevitably in Chapter V ("Liturgical Ceremonies at the Sepulchre"), for here the author treats those dramatic or quasi-dramatic liturgical offices that have long been recognized as being among

¹⁰ See Brooks, p. 29.

¹¹ See Brooks, p. 29.

¹² See Brooks, p. 29.

¹³ C. Rohault de Fleury, *La Messe: Études archéologiques sur ses Monuments*, 8 vols., Paris, 1883-1889.

the origins of modern drama. These are the *Depositio*, *Elevatio*, and *Visitatio*, referred to above. In this special branch of the subject Professor Brooks has long been an acknowledged authority; and in view of the importance of this particular matter, and in view of the author's superior equipment for elucidating it, I am glad to report that this chapter is the longest and most exhaustive in the volume.

Professor Brooks begins with a discussion of the origin of the *Depositio* and *Elevatio*. Referring most generously to a study of my own,¹⁴ he carefully reviews my positions in this special matter. As possible influences toward the formation of the *Depositio* and *Elevatio* I have advanced these four:¹⁵ (1) the processional reservation of the Host for the *Missa Praesantificationum* of Good Friday, (2) the symbolism associated with the altar and vessels used in various reservations of the Host, (3) the *Adoratio Crucis* of Good Friday, inevitably concluding with a ceremonial suggesting the *Depositio*, and (4) a certain papal ceremonial on Easter morning which shows resemblances to the *Elevatio*. Of these alleged influences, the only one in which Professor Brooks finds substantial force is the third: the ceremonial of the *Adoratio Crucis*. In choosing this ceremonial for emphasis he discriminates, I think, correctly. In any case he selects the influence that is most readily demonstrable, since in certain versions the *Depositio* is attached directly to the *Adoratio*, as a sequel.

Although Professor Brooks is inclined to dismiss my other proposals, I should scarcely be human, I suppose, were I not to linger over them wistfully for an instant. My suggestion of influence from the papal ceremonial of Easter morning seems to him "unnecessary and rather improbable, in view of the fact that *Depositio* and *Elevatio* doubtless originated north of the Alps."¹⁶ To me this disposition of the matter seems fair enough. Although I should have been glad to have Professor Brooks mention the undeniable resemblances between the

¹⁴ This study is *The Dramatic Associations of the Easter Sepulchre* (University of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature, No. 10, Madison, 1920). In apologizing for referring to myself in the course of this review I must lay the responsibility upon Professor Brooks, who has graciously drawn attention to my study, by ample commendation and notable corrections. In order both to explain Professor Brook's procedure in this chapter, and to acknowledge a valued compliment from him, I venture to quote his words (p. 30): "At the time that this chapter was planned and the material for it brought together, there was no satisfactory study of the *Depositio* and *Elevatio*. Since then there has appeared an excellent study of their development by Professor Karl Young, with a goodly number of new texts. It becomes my purpose therefore to add some new data to his and to discuss upon the basis of the combined material, certain aspects of the development of these two ceremonies."

¹⁵ See Young, pp. 9-29.

¹⁶ See Brooks, p. 32, note 8.

papal ceremonial and the *Elevatio*, and although I see no impossibility in an influence from papal Rome upon ceremonials north of the Alps, I agree with him in viewing this possible influence as relatively unimportant.

As to the influence of the Thursday-Friday reservation and of the symbolism attached to altar, chalice, and pyx I cannot yield so readily. Although I grant at once that for this influence I can offer no direct demonstration, I cannot ignore the clear parallelism between the ceremonial of the *Depositio-Elevatio* and the older ceremonial of carrying the Host to an altar, or other "place of repose," on Holy Thursday, and taking the Host up from this revered *locus* on Good Friday; nor can I ignore the symbolism that undeniably marked the altar and vessels as *sepulchra*.¹⁷ All I can do at present is to confess that I have no document asserting that the creators of the *Depositio* and *Elevatio* were consciously influenced by the reservation and the symbolism; but I must also declare that I see no likelihood of their escape from a model so conspicuous and a symbolic suggestion so pervasive.

Having discussed the origins of the dramatic ceremonials under consideration, Professor Brooks provides a classified list of "all the texts available for the study of the *Depositio* and *Elevatio*." Particularly acceptable in this list are the extensions and corrections of the data found in my own publication already referred to. The careful inclusiveness of the new list is such that for many years students of this subject must use it as a point of departure. This or that reviewer will inevitably add a stray text or two from recondite printed sources; but I surmise that such additions will not be numerous or weighty. The value of the list is further increased through the arranging of texts according to countries and according to the object, or objects, used for the "burial" (Cross, Host, or Cross and Host). The list provides information also concerning the position of each text in the liturgy. From this able compilation the author effectually draws fresh conclusions as to geographical distribution, and as to prevailing local types.

Professor Brook's acute attention to the texts themselves is seen, for example, in his useful elucidation of the occasional expression *Imago Crucifixi* for the object placed in the *sepulchrum*. This expression,—puzzling to me in my study of the matter,¹⁸—is shown to mean, in all probability, "an image of Christ not attached to a cross."¹⁹ With similar acumen the author points to the interesting fact that the Host seems to have been considered inappropriate for the *Depositio*, and that at times the Host was not put into the *sepulchrum* with the cross

¹⁷ Professor Brooks (pp. 21, 61) recognizes the existence of this symbolism.

¹⁸ See Young, p. 109.

¹⁹ See Brooks, pp. 37-40.

on Friday, but was placed there on Easter morning, immediately before the *Elevatio*, for use only in this latter observance.²⁰

The closing pages of this valuable chapter²¹ deal vigorously with two modern developments connected with the *sepulchrum*: the "heilige Gräber" and the "false" sepulchre. In churches in which the ceremonials of the sepulchre continued into the Renaissance there developed in connection with the *Depositio* and *Elevatio* a special exposition of the Host. In modern Germany the sepulchre of Holy Week seems to be used primarily as a base for the monstrance of the exposition. Since the Host is a symbol of rejoicing, the use of "heilige Gräber" for the exposition is distinctly uncanonical.

Another violation of strict liturgical tradition is the use of the term "sepulchre" for the "place of repose" in which the Host for the *Missa Praesantificatorum* is kept from Holy Thursday to Good Friday. Professor Brooks discriminates ably between this "false" sepulchre and the "true" *sepulchrum* of the liturgico-dramatic offices.²²

Chapter Six ("The Location of the Sepulchre in the Church") is brief, and may be briefly reviewed. Professor Brooks finds that in England the *sepulchrum* "seems to have been always in the north side of the chancel," and in France, "usually in the choir, or chancel, either at a specially prepared Sepulchre or about the altar serving as a sepulchre."²³ In Germany and in Italy, on the other hand, the *sepulchrum* was commonly placed outside the choir. These conclusions the author supports by an adequate citation of documents.

With Chapter Seven ("The Nature of the Sepulchre in Continental Churches") Professor Brooks begins his thoroughgoing description of the actual physical structures used as *mise en scène* for the dramatic ceremonials that have been completely considered in Chapter Five. The present chapter considers the sepulchres used on the Continent, the evidence being found chiefly in the rubrics of the dramatic ceremonials themselves.

The author finds evidence for the following types:²⁴

"1. The high altar, either merely suggestive of the sepulchre, where, as in the *Resurrexi* tropes, there was no real action, or actually representing it in the *Visitatio*.

"2. Some vessel or small structure on the high altar, generally or always with a veil or cloth either covering it or hanging down around it.

²⁰ See Brooks, p. 40.

²¹ Pp. 44-52.

²² Additional references are found in my *Dramatic Association*, p. 16.

²³ See Brooks, p. 53.

²⁴ See Brooks, p. 59.

"3. Coffered-shaped sepulchre, generally or always with a cloth or cloths over it.

"4. Coffered or altar surrounded by curtains.

"5. Temporary wooden structure that could be entered.

"6. Chapel with receptacle for cross or Host on or before its altar.

"7. The sepulchre of the present-day exposition rite, usually a tomb-like structure with a recumbent image of Christ, surmounted by a veiled monstrance in which the Host is exposed."

Although Professor Brooks modestly remarks that such a classification "cannot be very definite," I venture my own opinion that this one is highly adequate. That it should entirely supersede that of Professor Bonnell²⁶ is inevitable from the wider range of evidence upon which it rests. Professor Brooks had at his disposal, for example, large numbers of texts of the *Depositio* and *Elevatio* that were unknown to Professor Bonnell.

After announcing his new classification, Professor Brooks, in separate sections, fully describes each of the seven types of sepulchre, summoning substantial textual evidences, and furnishing three useful photographs. Through the author's generosity, I am able to add a detail to his discussion of the decoration of the sepulchre. From the *Regnum Papisticum* of Thomas Naogeorgus²⁶ Professor Brooks quotes a passage showing that the sepulchrum was sometimes decorated with flowers.²⁷ He now very kindly sends me privately the following earlier passage from *Das Weltbuch* (1534) of Sebastian Frank, showing the use of flowers and describing interesting details of the *Depositio* and *Elevatio*:

Am Karfreitag vor Ostern tregt man aber eyn creüt-herumb in eyner procession/leget eyn grosz gestorben menschenz bild in eyn grab/darbei kniet man/brent ser vil liechter/vnd singt darbei tag vn nacht den Psalter mit abgewechseltem Chor/besteckt das grab mit feihel vnnnd allerley blumen/opffert darein gelt/eyerfladen etc. bisz disz bild erstehet. . . .Harnach inn der Osternacht bald nach mitnacht/stehet yeder mann vff gen metten/da nimpt man den hültzin bloch oder bild Christi ausz dem grab/erhebet jn vnd tregt in vor yederman her/vnd singen all einhellig/Christ ist erstanden/als dann ist der fasten gen himmel geleüttet. Da isset yeder man was er hat/(fol. 132r).

In taking leave of this valuable chapter I venture to emphasize the intimate association between certain types of

²⁶ See Bonnell, pp. 667-682.

²⁶ Edition of 1553.

²⁷ See Brooks, p. 69. It may be well to mention Barnabe Googe's English rendering of Naogeorgus's Latin, quoted by H. J. Feasey, *Ancient English Holy Week Ceremonial*, London, 1897, pp. 136-137.

sepulchrum and the altar. In view of this association, one may reasonably expect an influence of the altar upon the form of the *sepulchrum*,—more influence perhaps, than Professor Brooks specifically mentions.

For Chapter Eight ("Easter Sepulchres in England") the evidences from liturgico-dramatic sources are slight, since texts of the *Depositio*, *Elevatio*, and *Visitatio* from England are very few. Fortunately, however, generous information is available from such documents as church warden's accounts, church inventories, and mediaeval wills.

Justly pointing to the inaccuracy of the classifications of Wolcott, Feasey, and Bonnell, Professor Brooks proposes a more scholarly division of the Easter sepulchres of England into "two large classes, one the wholly temporary sepulchre and the other the largely temporary one with a permanent architectural base."²⁸ This classification recognizes the fact that the architectural structures (discussed in Chapter IX) were only part of the *sepulchrum* as actually fitted out for use in the dramatic ceremonials. In the present chapter are considered only the temporary sepulchres, and the temporary features associated with the permanent architectural designs. Into the details of the description I cannot enter; but I pause to quote a passage in which Professor Brooks expresses his opinion as to the special model upon which the English Easter sepulchre was formed:²⁹

There remain, however, the facts that altar and sepulchre had occasionally a canopy of the same type and each had lights and cloths upon or about it; but these are common means of adornment and of showing honor and do not seem to me to be convincing evidence that the sepulchre developed in imitation of the high altar. Certainly the resemblances between sepulchre and altar are not so close and specific as those between sepulchre and hearse, which are pointed out at various places in the course of this chapter. It seems to me that the English Easter sepulchre developed very largely in imitation of the church burial of persons of rank.

This may be accepted as a reasonable conclusion concerning the *temporary, or portable*, sepulchre. The central and essential part was a coffer of wood, and the frame about the coffer resembled a hearse in form, and was sometimes actually called "hearse."³⁰ Although Professor Brooks may be slightly recalcitrant in his unwillingness to admit influence from the altar,³¹ he has, in my opinion, placed the emphasis in the right place.

Chapter Nine ("Permanent Architectural or Sculptural Sepulchres of the Continent and England") closes the mono-

²⁸ See Brooks, pp. 72-73.

²⁹ See Brooks, p. 85.

³⁰ See Brooks, pp. 75-77.

³¹ For further indications that the altar may have influenced the form of the Easter sepulchre see Brooks, p. 89, and Fig. 21.

graph proper with a description of the permanent Easter sepulchres of Europe. There are, in the first place, the churches, side chapels, and small independent chapels built in direct imitation of the rotunda over the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem. A second group are the sculptural representations in Germany from the late middle ages, describable thus:³²

The moment usually represented is after the Entombment; the body of Christ lies stretched out on top of a sarcophagus, like the effigy on ordinary chest tombs of that time; behind are the Maries, at each end usually an angel, and in front, generally in relief on the front side of the sarcophagus, the sleeping guards.

The group of Easter sepulchres in England differ from those of Germany in having no image of Christ. The English sepulchre is sometimes a structure solely for dramatic use in Holy Week and on Easter, and sometimes the tomb of a founder, so constructed as to serve also as a *mise en scène* for the dramatic ceremonials.

Though this chapter is short, it treats the subject comprehensively and lucidly, and generously supplies three excellent photographic illustrations (Figures 20, 21, and 22.)

In taking leave of the particulars of this study³³ I wish once more to express my pleasure in Professor Brooks's whole accomplishment. Rarely does a scholar's product so adequately satisfy a recognized need. I venture to say that virtually all students of the church drama have felt themselves impeded, at times, through the absence of a thorough treatise upon the Easter sepulchre. These students will hasten to applaud the monograph that Professor Brooks has now completed with distinction.

Finally, as a former editor of a series conducted in friendly rivalry with the *University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature*, I wish to congratulate Professor Brooks upon his editorial auspices. One of my substantial pleasures in reviewing the present monograph has arisen from its handsome format, its adequate letter-press, and its generous and successful illustrations in photograph.

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³² Brooks, p. 88.

³³ I regret that I cannot linger over the new texts of the *Deposilio*, *Elevatio*, and *Visitatio* in the Appendix. This rich collection of fresh material from manuscripts and incunabula deserves much more than this casual mention at the end of a review.